



Rhode Island Emergency Management Advisory Council

Meeting Notice

THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL WILL BE HELD:

January 22, 2008

2:00 PM

East Providence City Hall

145 Taunton Avenue

East Providence, RI

Room 306

AGENDA

I. Call to Order/ Attendance

Lt. Governor Elizabeth Roberts (Chair)	Kate McCarthy-Barnett (DOH)
Major General Robert T. Bray (Vice)	Janet Essex (Governor's Office)
L. Anthony Cirillo, MD (DOH)	Laurie White (Greater Providence Chamber)
Capt. James Swanberg (RISP)	Brian Glancy (Communications Working Group)
Lt. Darren Delaney (RISP)	Stephen King (Judiciary)
James Lanni (PUC)	Raymond Sousa (Harbormasters)
Robert Pesapane (RIEMA)	Nami Moghadam (DOT)
Thomas Kilday (RIEMA)	Bob Thorne (TSA)
Paul Stasiuk (National Grid)	John Holt (Red Cross)
Richard Brown (RILCT)	Rep. Joseph Trillo
Gregory Scungio (E-911)	Mike McDonough (TSA RAIL)
Dawn Marie Lewis (HARI)	Tom Walsh (TSA RAIL)
Steve Preston (HAZMAT)	Al Galinelli (Warren FD/EMA)
Leo Kennedy (Cranston FD)	Vincent Marzullo (RI Citizen Corp)
Eliot Krieger (RIDE)	Geof Milner (RI-Saturn)
Randall Rickets (VA)	

Lt. Governor Roberts thanked East Providence Mayor Isadore Ramos, City Manager Richard Brown and the city of East Providence for hosting the meeting of the council.

II. Approval of the minutes from Dec. 18, 2007

Rep. Trillo moved a motion to approve the minutes. Dr. Cirillo seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

III. Report to The Honorable Donald L. Carcieri on Winter Weather Response

A. Comments from the Chairman, Lt. Governor Elizabeth H. Roberts

Lieutenant Governor Roberts:

This report is step 1 of our process to solve the challenges we encountered on Dec. 13. Government is an evolution and we will need to do more to continue to confront these challenges.

The priorities of our state during any emergency should be communication, coordination and response. All three of these components failed on December 13th and the action items proposed and implemented in the attached report are designed to ensure that this situation is never repeated.

Each challenge we face as a state presents an opportunity to improve our existing capabilities, create new systems that will bolster our preparedness and make changes to systems that are not functioning properly. This report examines the problems highlighted by the storm, but more importantly documents the remedial changes already implemented and that should be undertaken.

These changes would not have been possible without the collaborative efforts of the Rhode Island National Guard, the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency, the Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce Coalition, the state Department of Education and the Rhode Island School Superintendent's Association (RISSA), the Rhode Island Board of Higher Education, the Rhode Island Independent Higher Education Association and the Rhode Island Broadcasters' Association.

I want to also thank the mayors, council presidents, administrators, local responders and EMA officials for their input on this process. Municipal cooperation is instrumental for the state's emergency preparation and response.

I look forward to the council's input and comments, as well as the continued progress we will achieve in the coming days and months.

B. Comments from MG Robert Bray, Adjutant General RING

MG Bray said the state has an opportunity to take a positive approach to advancing RI EMA goals. This incident furthers the necessary move for interoperability and collaboration to enhance communication.

The state has a ways to go to achieve interoperability and Dec. 13 was a bump in the road. The state has put in place interim practices to make sure we have capability today. RIEMA has more work to do with stakeholders to smooth out that road for better communication.

RI EMA will do that work with a great deal of fervor.

MG Bray said RIEMA has made strides to continue strategic planning but also becoming more of an operational organization. He still is not completely satisfied.

There are buzz words that will continue to guide improvements: Situational awareness, operational picture, understanding where the resources need to go. MG Bray said the state has all of the resources (including good people in towns) now we need to improve the capability.

C. Corrective Action Items

1. Emergency Operations and Public Communication-**GENERAL BRAY**

Lt. Governor Roberts said a lot of changes made immediately. She reminded the council of the woman who asked at the Dec. 18 meeting what we would do for the next storm. Roberts said solutions were in place directly following Dec. 13th.

MG Bray described the interim snow plan including the activation matrix for weather emergencies with precipitation.

The matrix implements proactive activation of the EOC and was implemented almost overnight post storm.

The plan implementation for Jan. 13 snowstorm was very successful.

The entire plan is still a draft at this point.

An important reporting practice is situational awareness. This tells the state where communities sit at any given day and time. This implementation had a bumpy start because of the immediacy, but it is an important tool because it gives the state EOC a look at where the state stands.

Before Dec. 13, dialogue for emergency response has been one way. The towns report to RI EMA. The public and the state are not satisfied with that. The EOC will have a 24-hour watch desk in order to know what is going on at any given time.

This will ensure that the state will already have assessments ready before the locals make the call that they are overwhelmed.

The process post storm involved positive collaboration with multiple agencies including RI DOT, RISP and other stakeholders including the chambers and school systems.

Communication is key to this process. The state spent a lot of money on the 800 MHz system, but technology is only part of the solution. There needs to be procedures to make sure they are used correctly.

We have implemented and coordinated the technology well and now the second phase starts.

RI EMA has been looking into technology bridge software in order to communicate across various devices. This would also give RI EMA more communication assets.

For example: There was a missing persons search for a woman in Exeter. It was a collaborative effort that could have been enhanced by bridging technology that would be able to track responders to make sure no space has been untouched in the search party. It would be expensive but worth it. RI EMA Is looking at how federal funds could be used to can pay for it.

2. Statewide Education Communication and Coordination-Lt. Governor Roberts

Meetings on Dec. 21st and January 3

Facilitated a discussion of:

- Current practices and policies for the schools in a large scale weather emergency;
- Early release decisions – how made and by whom;
- Communication with parents;
- Challenges relating to student transportation; and
- How state government can support the efforts of educational institutions and local school districts in a large-scale weather emergency.

Eliot Krieger from the Rhode Island Department of Education said the Rhode Island Broadcaster's Association that Lt. Governor Roberts help introduce earlier in the year worked extremely well.

Action Items from report:

- Opportunities should be examined for public/private partnerships in utilizing web-based emergency continuation of operations software. Lt. Governor Roberts will create a Public/Private Partnership Working Group within the Domestic Preparedness Subcommittee to organize these efforts and report back to the full Emergency Management Advisory Council.
- General Bray and school officials committed to establishing direct, two-way electronic communication in the event of a weather emergency to avoid dropped connections through local emergency management officials.

While the early closure or delayed opening decision is made at the local level (or in consultation with regional neighboring district officials) in the event of a large scale weather emergency local officials welcome recommendations from state level officials like the Governor or emergency management state level leaders.

All of the above procedural changes were implemented during the January 13-14th snowstorm and are functioning correctly. General Bray was able to give Governor Carcieri's recommendation to close schools on Monday, January 14th to every community in Rhode Island through the education administration communication networks discussed in this section.

COMMENTS:

MG Bray said in the discussions with education officials it became apparent that superintendents know their business and have well defined plans. They all have the authority to act independently but together they have a critical impact.

It is also not the intent of the RIEMA or EOC to overcome the EMA directors. The local EMA directors have told MG Bray that they have a job and they know how to do it. The EMA directors should be communicating to the school superintendents.

Rep. Trillo asked:

Has this matrix including the role of E911 and what triggers are in place?

MG Bray:

He discussed the role of E911 with Ray Labelle. There is a protocol in place to make sure his operation at E911 contact state EOC directly. MG Bray said RI EMA is still working on the relationship especially involving city and town dispatches.

MG Bray said there is a new practice at RI EMA that every Friday EMA does a 7 day forecast assessment.

Rep Trillo:

What about something other than weather? Terrorist attack? Accident? They need to ability to coordinate.

MG Bray:

The new practices haven't limited implementation only to the weather. We are developing best practices for all uses of the EOC.

3. Statewide Employer Communication and Coordination-Lt. Governor Roberts

Lt. Governor Roberts introduce Laurie White from the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce and John Gregory from the Northern Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce

Laurie White said the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce represent 10,000 businesses. White said under the leadership of Lt Governor Roberts and MG Bray the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce brought together major and small employers.

The focus of these meetings was what the private sector can do.

On January 13 the implementation of the private sector advisory system began. Lt. Gov. Roberts phoned Laurie White that Sunday afternoon. The advisory was sent from the EOC and Laurie White activated the system for her members. The activation was followed up with a phone call from MG Bray.

White said the system worked seamlessly in a matter of five minutes. One impediment was the time frame. Because it was a weekend only those near a home computer or using a blackberry received the notice.

The major employers in the state were asked to consider staggered openings and releases. This alleviated traffic in the city of Providence and on major roadways.

White said she was happy to assist and the chambers would be happy to do it again for any event.

MG Bray said the response was very quick and effective.

Lt. Governor Roberts said the meeting was very much a dialogue. Care New England, LifeSpan and financial institutions commented that they cannot and do not close. Because of the differences in major employers, there isn't a one fit approach. But Lt. Governor Roberts said the state is building on good

practices already in place. Many big businesses tell first responders in their municipalities that they are releasing early.

MG Bray said there were many redundant systems in place including the use of interstate signs. RISF was prepared to position officers if the weather was severe. The collaboration that we gained through these meetings was important. We still have a great deal of capability and we need to continue the coordination.

MG Bray said the RIBA system has been such a wonderful tool and the state will encourage businesses to use it as well.

4. Traffic Plan Coordination and Implementation-**Lt Governor Roberts**

Lt. Governor Roberts said after talking with every mayor throughout the state, she found many had traffic plans for problem areas. An example of this is Mayor Scott Avedisian plan for Apponaug.

Interviews with mayors and administrators of municipalities with major traffic centers and other significant arteries found that while some cities and towns have specific traffic plans for “problem areas” there is a lack of statewide coordination of traffic management efforts.

Municipal officials whose cities and towns are bisected by interstate highways report that they need clear communication from the state police in advance of a decision to reroute traffic from the interstate to local secondary roads.

- Law Enforcement Working Group will gather and review traffic plans from cities and towns that are dissected by major state roads and interstates.
- The Law Enforcement Working Group is also charged with coordinating with the Rhode Island State police and municipal police departments to streamline local traffic plans and Department of Transportation/Rhode Island State Police weather emergency detours.
- A special coordination sub-group of the Law Enforcement Working Group is charged with meeting with the City of Providence public safety officials to determine the best use of ingress and egress in the event of an incident-related traffic situation.

5. Municipal Coordination with State Emergency Management- **MG Bray**

This incident reminded stakeholders of the different ways cities and towns operate in the state.

The systems RI EMA has in place are incipient and there is a need for more work. Many communities’ EMA are not 24 hours. The question for RI EMA is how the state can do a better job communicating to cities and towns. There is a lot to be done to sync it all up. RI EMA is committed to working along those lines.

MG Bray and Lt. Governor Roberts want to meet with officials at each of the municipalities to get feedback on their issues.

MG Bray said he knows the number 1 issue is about money and resources. But the state needs to know cities and towns have the capability to communicate. MG Bray said RI EMA would help them work through funding issues.

6. Public Works Recommendations-Lt. Governor Roberts

Many town and city officials addressed the need for a more rational system of contracting plow vendors. It was reported that many times municipalities are bidding for the services of a limited number of vendors of plowing services, thereby driving up costs to both the state and the municipalities and limiting availability for some communities. Many municipalities have developed efficient and innovative response methods that other municipalities may not be aware of currently. Information sharing between towns can lead to more effective response on a town-by-town basis.

Action and Implementation:

- The Department of Administration should develop and implement a statewide bidding process for plow contractors as they do for salt and sand.
- The Department of Transportation should develop and implement once during the calendar year a “best practices” meeting for municipal public works directors to develop information sharing between municipalities and to determine new methods of delivery and response.

IV. New Business/ Member Comments and/or Suggestion

Matteo Gugliemetti presented information on funding for the low-income energy fund.

The state received an additional \$4.5 million and without that funding the program would have closed within the week. This funding keeps the program open through the remainder of the winter.

MG Bray reminded the council that 2-1-1 is the number to call for homeless concerns.

Rep Trillo moved a motion to adjourn. Dr. Cirillo seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.